

# The Adventures of Hassan and Jorg



"And over you are Watchers - Kiraman, Katibin - who know all that you do." (82:10-12)

Part One: Aswan

Part Two: Invasion

Part Three: Capture

A short science-fiction story by Abdul-Aziz ibn Myatt, written in Shawaal 1423 AH, originally designed to be read aloud by one of his Muslim friends to his fourteen-year old son, with the story possibly inspired by the American led invasion of Afghanistan the year before.

The main protagonist is Hassan, a young resident of the city of New Aswan on the rather desolate planet Lam, a colony established over a century before his birth when many people fled the turmoil and cultural persecutions which followed the great rebellion on Earth. The rebels - whose centres were Aswan and Siwa - sought to violently overthrow what had become a military dictatorship in all but name, and the military retaliation was severe, global and bloody.

The rebellion failed to achieve most of its aims, but did lead, after several years of bloodshed and turmoil, to a long period of civilian rule which brought stability and prosperity to most of the citizens of Earth. During this period, Lam concentrated on building trading links with nearby colonies and star-systems, and on developing new technology, particularly that related to Space travel.

The Earth Government slowly ventured back into Space, establishing military outposts and regaining control of several nearby colonies which had declared their independence from Earth control. Growing more confident, and eager to maintain its new prosperity, the Earth Government began a policy of expansion, driven by the ever expanding power and influence of the military many of whose idealistic young Officers dreamed of an Empire centred on Earth and who took as their model the ancient Earth Empire of Rome. The President of the Earth Government was concerned about growing divisions on Earth itself, and within the military, and believed that by encouraging expansion, and spreading the idea of a new Earth Empire, he could unite its people.

At the same time, the President and his military advisors were becoming increasingly occupied with the growing influence of Lam, and particularly about the new synchron star-drive which Lam had invented which Earth believed would give Lam an overwhelming military superiority. With Presidential elections near, and with his personal popularity decreasing, the President decided it would be an opportune time to plan and then launch an invasion of Lam and so gain control of Lam's new Space technology. As part of this plan, Martial Law was declared in the territories between the city of Siwa on Earth (anciently, an oasis in the desert) and the city of Aswan, for the peoples in these territories follow the culture and customs of the colonists on Lam. Many of those who founded the colony on Lam were from this area of Earth.

Jorg is one of the many rogue traders - or Space Pirates as they call themselves - whose base is one of the planets of the Eridani system, not many parsecs from Lam. These traders have little or no respect for Earth Government, or government in general, and although their main occupation is stellar trade, they have been known to work together to capture, and hold for ransom, starships and their crew, just as some of them have been known to acquire certain things by dubious means.

It seems further stories were planned, but never published with part four titled Earth Attack.

The first adventure takes place while Earth is preparing to invade Lam. A Glossary of terms relating to the culture of Lam and the Earth society of the time is given below.

The stories are republished here, under a Creative Commons license, with the permission of Mr Myatt.

Text Source:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20040429170737/http://hassanadventures.jeeran.com/>

---



## **Part One**

### **Aswan**

#### **1.**

Hassan decided he quite liked the quietness of Space-travel. All he could hear was the gentle humming of the Stardrive engine. He was the Pilot - and sole crew member - of the Cargo Shuttle Belial 5 and had settled into the routine well. So well, that although he was only twenty years of age and on only his third solo trading journey, he already felt like a Space veteran.

Dressed in the loose flowing garments that all the male inhabitants of Lam 3 wore, he stroked his full black beard with his right hand - a habit he had acquired from his scholarly father - and contemplated the infinity of space. But his quiet was broken by an audible alarm:

"Warning. Hostile ships on intercept. Weapons lock detected. Warning. Hostile ships on intercept. Weapons lock detected."

The Shuttle's sensor array showed three ships, closing fast. Already the Shuttle computer had begun to send, and repeat, the automatic greeting to approaching ships:

"This is Cargo Shuttle Belial 5 on route from Lam 3 to Eridani 2. Please acknowledge."

There was no response. Hassan moved to the control console to raise the defensive shields but the computer beat him - the 'Shields Active' display glowed red as his hand reached it.

The hostile ships closed faster than he expected, and began an attack run. They fired, one after the other. Hassan switched to manual control, executed several evasive manoeuvres, and returned their fire. But his slow Shuttle, single StarCanon, and low-powered shields were no match for the ships. There were jolts as the shuttle sustained several hits, and his control console flickered briefly.

"Warning," the computer announced, somewhat unnecessarily Hassan thought, "Navigation, propulsion and weapons systems damaged. Incident report sent to Aswan Cargo Port on Lam 3."

There was nothing he could do except send a personal message to the attacking ships who were now so close he could see them against the background of stars. They were larger than he thought, but he could make out no markings or insignia.

"This is Hassan Zahr aboard Cargo Shuttle Belial 5. I am on a trading mission to Eridani 2 ....."

He got no further. One of the attacking vessels had quickly swopped over the Shuttle, and extended an enclosed gantry which suckered itself to the Shuttle's hull. The blast knocked Hassan over and, still dazed, he had no time to defend himself, as two heavily armed troopers with SpaceVizors covering their faces entered the Shuttle through the blast opening and dragged him back with them to their ship.

He was thrown into a dark and stuffy holding cell, and it took him a few moments to realize there was someone else in the cell with him.

"Hello?" he called out.

There was no reply, and no light at all for him to see by. So he sat where he was, leant up against the cold metallized material of the wall. After what seemed only few moments the sliding cell door opened, very fast, letting in a blinding light. Two troopers, dressed in grey military uniforms with SpaceVizors shielding their faces, dragged him to his feet.

He was taken to a small brightly lit cabin where two men, also in grey military uniforms, sat behind a console. Apart from the console, the cabin was bare.

"And you are?" one of the men asked him as he was made to stand between his two guards.

"Hassan Zahr, trader. On route to Eridani 2."

The two men stared at him. He judged the elder one to be in the middle years of his life, with the other one perhaps a decade younger. Clean-shaven, with their hair closely cropped in a military manner, both Officers showed no emotion.

"And you are from the planet Lam?" The younger of the two officers said.

"Yes. May I ask why you attacked my ship and - "

The Officer ignored the question. "Why were you carrying a shipment of weapons?"

"My cargo bays were empty," Hassan replied. "I was on route to collect - "

"I ask you again - why were you carrying the shipment of weapons we found aboard your vessel?"

"And I repeat my answer - my cargo bays were empty."

His questioner smiled, and it was not a kind smile. "Your word against ours."

"Have you no honour?"

This clearly annoyed the Officer, who repeated his question.

"I ask you once again - why were you carrying the shipment of weapons we found aboard your vessel?"

"You have no right to hold me here," Hassan said.

"We are the law here."

"And you are?"

"Shall we just say - " and the Officer smiled that smile again, "your enemy. Or your friend, if you help us. We are very generous to our friends, and very harsh with our enemies. Now - about the smuggling of these weapons. A very serious crime - punishable by many years penal servitude, if I am not mistaken. Of course, we can forget about the smuggling - turn a blind eye as the saying goes - if you agree to assist us. We have had you under surveillance for some time - since your last visit to Eridani.

"So you see, we know quite a lot about you and know you can assist us. You are a trader, and so am I. I buy and sell information. It is a seller's market at the moment, so whatever price you want, I shall consider it."

"I am an honest trader who trades only goods. Practical goods that you can see and touch. So I cannot help you."

"We shall see. I give you some time to reflect. And remember - there could be serious charges brought against you, and there is no law here but ours."

"You are wrong - there is the law of Allah and the law of honour."

Annoyed again, the Officer gestured to the guards. "Take him away!"

Back in the dark holding cell, Hassan was surprised when a voice said: "They will be back for you soon."

Suddenly, there was light. Hassan could see his fellow captive, who held a tiny sphere in the palm of his right hand which radiated a dim light in all directions. The man was young - perhaps the same age as Hassan himself - and dressed as Hassan had seen some rogue Earth traders dress on his last visit to Eridani 2: he wore a colourful bandana on his head, brown trousers, a brown collarless top and old Earth-style combat boots

"And you must be from Lam - judging by your clothes and beard. I'm Jorg Nansen. Space Pirate," the man said proudly.

"Hassan Zahr. Do you know whose those people are?"

"Some sort of elite unit. Out from Earth. Took me yesterday." He touched the left side of his face, which was badly bruised. "I've been hearing a lot of talk recently about a unit called EarthForce. Guess it's them."

"It is. And I don't plan to stay here," Hassan said. "How about you?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you. I could use your help."

"What for?" Jorg asked.

"Escape."

"There is no escape from here."

"I shall try."

"Any weapons on you?"

"No."

"Any plan?"

"Not yet," Hassan said.

"What have you got, then?"

"Faith. InshaAllah."

Jorg started to laugh, then thought better of it.

"What happened to your ship?" Hassan asked him.

"Same as yours, I guess. Shot up, boarded, then cast adrift."

"How many crew on this ship?"

"Regular intercept class like this - about seven or so. I guess."

"Could you pilot it?"

"Easy! You're not planning what I think you're planning, are you?"

"Probably." Hassan smiled. "We shall go when they come back."

"Just like that?"

"Yes, InshaAllah. You can handle weapons, I assume."

"Any type; any make."

"Then - we must wait," Hassan said, and sat down on the floor facing the only entrance, and the only exit.

Jorg started to say something but Hassan interrupted. "We must wait in silence, and in darkness."

So they waited in the darkness of their cell, hearing only the faint humming of the ventilation system. It was a long wait - or seemed a long wait to Hassan - and he was about to stretch and exercise his arms when the door opened. Fast though the door opened, Hassan was faster.

He leapt up in one graceful movement, his right foot connecting with the vizor of the trooper who stood a little way outside, a stun gun in his outstretched hand. The blow knocked the trooper back and against the wall and, stunned, he crumpled to the deck. Hassan had already landed from his flying kick, and turned toward the other trooper who just stood facing him, momentarily immobilized by the surprise and the swiftness of Hassan's attack. Before the trooper could react, Hassan lunged toward him, took hold of him and threw him to the deck, wresting the stungun from his hand as he did so.

"Here!" he said to Jorg, throwing him the gun. Then, taking the stungun from the other trooper, Hassan calmly checked its setting before ushering the dazed troopers into the cell while Jorg relieved them of their other weapons.

"Well," Jorg said, as he closed the cell door, "that's two down, and five or so to go. Which way now?"

"This way," Hassan replied confidently, pointing to his right, although he really had no idea which direction was best.

It was a good choice - from the EarthForce point of view. For they had not gone far when they encountered two more troopers one of whom managed to fire his weapon before Hassan rushed toward him.

The shot missed, and the ensuing fight was soon over - although it was not much of a fight, just one startled trooper after another being knocked over by Hassan's swift and powerful kicks and then relieved of their weapons by Jorg, who now had so many he was finding them difficult to carry until Hassan came to his assistance and took one, a blast rifle with which he prodded the two fallen troopers, gesturing to them to get to their feet.

They did, and Hassan marched them in front of him as he and Jorg cautiously went from deck to deck until they reached the bulkhead door to the Bridge of the small intercept-class starship. Hassan pressed the control panel and, as the door fastly opened, he pushed the two troopers through. The two Officers and one trooper inside had no time to draw their weapons.

The two Officers were the ones who had questioned Hassan . "Please put your weapons down, very slowly," Hassan said politely, pointing the blast rifle at them.

They obeyed, and Hassan and Jorg ushered their captives out and along the narrow confining decks until they reached the holding cell.

"Please accept my apologies, " Hassan said to the elder of the two Officers. "You shall be released as soon as possible. When we arrive at our destination I shall arrange for a transport to take you back to Earth."

Hassan was surprised when the Officer nodded and saluted him, Earth-style, with the closed right hand being placed

over the heart in imitation of the ancient Roman custom. The Officer then joined the other captives in the cell.

## 2.

Back on the Bridge, Jorg settled down at the navigator's station. "Eridani, then?" he asked Hassan.

"No. Lam 3. And as fast as this ship can go, InshaAllah."

"Sure thing! They won't take kindly to this."

"Who won't?"

"The EarthForce guys. From what I've heard they're a tough bunch."

"No other life-signs aboard?"

Jorg checked his console. "No. All accounted for - us here, and our friends securely stowed away."

"Weapons and shields are all functional?"

"Far as I can tell. I guess we'll be defending ourselves?" Jorg asked with a huge grin.

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"Sure! It's not going to do my reputation any harm - seizing an EarthForce ship!"

Hassan moved to the tactical station where he could watch the sensors for approaching ships and activate the shields and weapons. "How long to Lam 3 at maximum velocity?"

Jorg entered some data into his console. "About five hours. In case you're interested - we've just got a call from Earth on a secure channel."

"Ignore all calls."

"Sure thing. Mind telling me where you learnt all that fancy fighting stuff?"

"I'll introduce you to the person who taught me if you're interested."

"Yep - that sort of stuff could be very useful."

They past the remainder of the long journey mostly in silence, each engaged in their own tasks - Hassan monitoring the sensor array for nearby ships, inbound communications, anything suspicious or potentially dangerous to them; Jorg monitoring his navigation console and the general status of the ship from its Stardrive to its life-support. Only once did they leave the Bridge - at Hassan's insistence and heavily armed - to check on their captives, with Hassan giving them water and food, scavenged from the ship's surprisingly small galley. And only once did they break their communication silence, with Hassan sending a coded message to the Spacedock on Lam 3 stating briefly their estimated arrival and the fact that they had EarthForce guests with them.

The approach to and landing in Lam Spacedock was routine, and Hassan was not surprised when he saw a large party of armed guards waiting by the airlock gantry. But he was surprised to see with them Malik Khattab. Tall, and sturdy, with a black beard even bushier than Hassan's and wearing a black galabiyya, he looked more like some ancient nomadic chieftain from a desert region of Earth than one of the most scholarly, powerful and influential men of the modern space colony of Lam. His black turban added to this impression, and he greeted Hassan as such an ancient chieftain might greet an old friend, as Hassan and Jorg descended from the ship's landing platform, while six heavily armed guards rushed by them to board the ship.

"Welcome to Aswan - or rather, New Aswan," Malik said to Jorg, "You are most welcome here. We are most grateful for your help, Jorg Nansen."

Jorg was so surprised that the man knew his name that he shook hands with Malik in an awkward way.

Malik turned to Hassan. "Assalamu Alaikum."

"WaAlaikum Salaam."

"You must refresh yourselves, eat and rest. You will be my guest, of course."

Hassan did not know what to say except "Alhamdulillah. Thank you". Then, remembering his promise to the EarthForce Officer, he was explaining the situation to Malik when the Officer and the other captives were marched down the landing platform, flanked by armed guards.

"I gave him my word," Hassan said to Malik, somewhat concerned.

"Then we must keep it!" Malik replied before approaching the Officer. "As my brother Hassan promised, you will be

returned to Earth, if that is what you wish, on the first available transport. I am forgetting my manners!" And he gestured with his hands. "I am Malik Khattab."

The Officer saluted him. "Captain Henry Teal."

"I trust you will understand our precautions," Malik said, inclining his head toward one of the armed guards. "You will be taken to a holding area until a ship is available to return you to Earth. Unless, of course, you wish to apply for temporary residence in which case you will be allocated accommodation and will be free to wander around and observe our way of life."

"Thank you, sir. Your offer is appreciated. But I am duty bound to return, with my men."

"I understand. Now, you must excuse me."

Malik and Hassan - with Jorg a few paces behind - walked out of the artificial light of the Spaceport into the bright, hot sun of Lam 3 and along the wide, clean but bustling street that connected the Spaceport with the great Founders Monument with its many and high minarets. Jorg found the dry heat oppressive, and he was sweating profusely after only a few minutes. But it did not take them long to reach the Monument and he was glad of the shade as they entered an archway that led to a courtyard where the sound of water fountains could be heard. The dwelling of Malik was simple and to Jorg's delight very cool.

"Please, do sit," Malik said to them, gesturing toward the plinths, strewn with cushions, which protruded from two of the walls and which were the only furnishings, apart from a solitary marble-like table and the one carved rock beside it which served as a chair. Malik excused himself, and went to fetch them some refreshments. He was not away long, returning with a tray containing drinking vessels full of cooled fruit juice and plates of sweet pastries.

For a few minutes, they drank, and ate, in silence - Jorg and Hassan perched on one of the plinths, with Malik seated at the table. Once, Jorg thought he saw a figure, swathed in black, by the arched doorway, and once he thought he faintly heard the sound of girlish laughter.

"So, " Malik said directly to Jorg, "what is it that you intend doing now?"

"Well, try and get back to Eridani."

"You have business there?"

Jorg smiled. "Yes. Just some trading."

"Profitable?"

"Not too bad. Could be better."

"Have you ever been to Earth, trading?"

"Once."

"Would you be interested in going there again? Trading, of course."

"I might be. You probably know of - how shall I say ?- our traders guild on Eridani with our motto: *If it can be traded for a profit, we will find it for you and trade it! No questions asked.*"

"Yes, I am familiar with the Space Pirates, as is everyone in these star-systems."

"Earth, you say?"

"Of course," Malik said, and smiled, "there is a risk, considering recent events."

"But the payment would naturally reflect the circumstances of the journey?"

"Quite so."

"Then we understand each other," Jorg said.

"It would seem so."

"There is one small, very small problem. I hate to mention it, but - "

"You have no ship," Malik said.

"I have no ship."

"Such things can be arranged. There is some urgency about this matter."

"Let me guess. You want me to get there before our friends from EarthForce or whoever they are get back, right?"

"As you said, we understand each other."

"And the cargo? The trading goods? Or shall I guess?"

"Only our friend Hassan - and some small containers."

Hassan, in his surprise, almost fell off his plinth.

"Always assuming," Malik continued, turning to Hassan, "that you are willing to undertake such a journey on behalf of our people."

"Yes," Hassan replied, although he was not quite sure what he was agreeing to.

"Exactly what kind of payment are we talking here?" Jorg asked Malik.

"A ship - as the first part."

"What kind of ship?"

"You should see it for yourself, and then decide, " Malik said. "The arrangement would be a second and final payment when you and Hassan return here. I shall provide all the details you need."

"What kind of final payment and how much?" Jorg asked him.

"Shall we say kursums - and ten thousand?"

"Twenty."

"Fifteen."

"Agreed - depending on the ship, of course."

"Quite so," Malik replied, stood up and shook hands with Jorg. "I shall meet you both at the Spaceport in one hour. Now, if you will excuse me I have some arrangements to make."

"Well, my friend," Jorg said, slapping Hassan on the back, "it seems an interesting adventure is about to begin!"

### 3.

Hassan suggested they spent their hour by going to the Founders Monument, a large building with a gold dome and tall minarets, and Jorg was happy to go along to view what he then regarded as part of Lam's strange and, to him, almost alien culture. But he was surprised by the place - and particularly by the large sign that was affixed to the door. It was in three languages, only one of which Jorg could read. He read: *Please leave your weapons here before entering.*

He looked beyond the large metallized doors covered in some kind of ornate calligraphy to see a long table underneath which, neatly placed, were several items of footwear. On the table itself lay an assortment of weapons: one stun gun, two deadly neural-net pistols and a small hand-held weapon of a type which Jorg had not seen before. Somewhat amazed by these, Jorg followed Hassan inside and then followed Hassan's example by removing his own footwear. This was not simple, for although Jorg's combat boots were made of an advanced technological material they were done up the very-old fashioned way with laces. For he was fond of being different, and it took him several minutes to remove his boots.

Another door led to a small chamber with washing facilities, while, inside, the vaulted windows of the large, high dome bathed the large open space in a gentle light, revealing six men sitting in a semi-circle, the focus of which was an elderly, green-turbaned man whose white beard moved as he softly spoke to them in a language foreign to Jorg, the white robes of this elder in contrast to the dark modern military uniforms of his listeners.

A scent that Jorg could not quite place pervaded the air, and he - following Hassan's example again - sat down in a corner on the beautifully decorated carpet which covered the whole of the floor. It was peaceful, sitting there in the warm light, listening in the coolness to the gentle beautiful sound of the elder reciting in some foreign language, and Jorg, unaware of the passing of time, was almost asleep when Hassan gestured that they should go.

"I would like to visit here again," he said as he stood with Hassan by the table of weapons, struggling to lace-up his boots.

Malik was waiting for them at the main entrance to the Spaceport and led them along curiously quiet and empty walkways, past curiously quiet and empty docking bays to a small black ship with no markings.

Jorg recognized the class of ship immediately he saw it. "Stealth raider," he said more to himself than anyone in particular.

"Then you agree?" Malik asked him.

"Sure do! This is worth it's weight in kursums! Marvellous - a ship with synchron-drive!"

"You have been on one before, as I understand it."

Jorg was surprised. "You are very well informed."

Malik smiled. "There is one clause to our agreement."

"I knew there would be. As soon as I saw the ship I knew."

"You understand then?"

"Sure I do."

"If there is any chance of this ship being seized by Earth forces you must deactivate and destroy the synchron-drive."

"It's a deal."

"I have your word of honour on that?"

"You have my word," Jorg said. "Does the ship have a name?"

"Siwa."

"I like the sound of that. I don't know what it means, but I like the sound of that."

Leaving Jorg to admire his new ship, Malik turned toward Hassan. "The other items to be delivered are aboard, and all the data you need is here, including ship activation codes." And he handed Hassan a small data-crystal.

By the time Malik and Hassan had said their brief farewells Jorg was already inside the ship, excitedly wandering around the flight deck. He was trying to activate the ship's main computer when Hassan joined him.

"Won't work without the codes in this," Hassan said, inserting the crystal into a small receptacle on the Captain's console.

"Authorization code accepted," the computer announced. "My identity is L9A."

"L9A" Hassan repeated.

"Voice pattern entered," L9A replied.

"Your turn, " Hassan said to Jorg.

"L9A" Jorg repeated.

"Voice pattern entered," L9A replied again. "Please enter deactivation code."

"Security feature, " Hassan said to Jorg. "L9A - deactivation code is regulus nine."

"Deactivation code logged. Please enter synchron-drive destruct sequence."

"Go ahead, " Hassan said, "it is your ship after all."

"L9A - synchron-drive destruct sequence is lupus lupus."

"Synchron-drive destruct sequence logged. Command sequence processed. Flight plan entered. Departure authorization obtained from Lam Spaceport."

"Shall we take the ship out?" Hassan asked Jorg.

"Sure! L9A - disengage spaceport locks."

"Locks disengaged," L9A responded.

"L9A - compute then execute on my mark normal departure with optimum orbit for synchron-drive start."

"Acknowledged."

"L9A - mark!"

"Normal departure being executed."

"L9A ," Jorg asked, "detail weapons and status."

L9A proceeded to give the details. "Five StarCanons; full compliment of ship-seeking disrupters capable of synchron 6, plus Harratan clusters and deep-space self-replicating mines. All weapons fully functional and ready."

"Well, that might give EarthForce something to ponder on! You know what's going on?"

"According to this data," Hassan replied, reading from the console which was relying information from the data-crystal, "Earth is planning to invade Lam 3."

L9A interrupted. "Optimum orbit achieved. Ready for synchron-drive start."



"L9A - what is your highest synchron-drive iteration?"

"The synchron-drive on this vessel has a highest iteration factor of 11."

"L9A -on my mark engage synchron-drive iteration 10. Destination as pre-entered flight plan."

"Acknowledged."

"L9A - mark!"

"Engaging synchron-drive iteration 10."

There was a slight shudder as the ship engaged its synchron-drive and then the planet below them disappeared from the view-screen to be replaced by stark blackness as they hurtled out of Lam's star-system into interstellar space at a velocity far in excess of that of light.

"You were saying, " Jorg said, "something about an invasion."

"Seems so."

"Why?"

"They don't like us."

"I never did understand politics. Now trading - that's different. So what are we to do when we reach Earth?"

"We are to exchange our cargo for our return passenger."

"Let me guess - this passenger does not have permission to leave."

"True. But it's a little more complicated than that."

"I thought it might be."

"He is in a detention cell on an EarthForce base."

Jorg sighed. "I knew there would be a catch. There always is. Pardon me for asking but is this what you were doing when we first met?"

"In a way. I was going to collect some of our people on Eridani who would return to Lam and take this ship on the same mission to Earth. But EarthForce got to them first it seems."

"So it is up to us."

"Yes."

"I guess this person important to you - to Lam."

"Certainly. He is man of great learning - what you would call one of our leaders. When they came to arrest him at his home, one of his sons tried to reason with them and they just killed him, there in front of his father."

Jorg could see that Hassan was angry, so he changed the subject. "This is a slightly different ship than the one I was on before."

"Latest model. Some improvements in weapons. More security features."

"I noticed."

"So - how come you have been on one before?"

"Business, you know the kind of thing. Someone - how shall I say? - borrowed one of these beauties when it was docked on Eridani and asked me to sort of test fly it seeing how I've got a bit of a reputation. As a Pilot I mean. Anyways, I got paid and next I heard some of your guys had got it back. Just after I docked and just before it was due to be shipped to Earth."

"These ships are valuable."

"So I've heard. Earth wants one very bad. The reward they've offered for one is - well, outstanding."

"That' s why we are going. They are holding the person I mentioned for ransom. They want to exchange him for some of these ships."

"Maybe, just maybe, " Jorg said, "I'm missing something here. They want one of these ships, and we are taking one of these ships to Earth."

"Well, as you said, it will be an adventure."

#### 4.

The long journey was uneventful - until they were roused from the routine they had established by L9A's sound and voice alarm.

"Warning. Unidentified vessels detected entering sensor range. Warning. Unidentified vessels detected entering sensor range."

Jorg had fallen asleep in the comfortable Pilot's chair, but he was soon awake and scanning his console.

"Unidentified vessels, " L9A continued, "now confirmed as Intercept Class, EarthForce. Engaging defensive shields. Siwa within weapons range of EarthForce vessels in three Earth minutes, twenty-five Earth seconds, their flight time."

"They've detected us, " Jorg said. "They're altering course to intercept."

"I suggest," Hassan said, "we just ignore them?"

"Are you serious?"

"Yes. "

Jorg started to say something, but L9A interrupted. "Siwa within weapons range of EarthForce vessels in nine Earth minutes, sixteen Earth seconds, their flight time."

Jorg smiled. "I see. They can detect us, but not intercept. Obvious really, given our velocity. So what now?"

"We expect a welcoming party when we reach Earth space in -" and he checked his console - "about thirty minutes, at this velocity."

Hassan was wrong. Less than two minutes later, L9A activated the alarm again.

"Warning. EarthForce ships detected in sensor range. Warning EarthForce ships detected in sensor range. Engaging defensive shields. Vessels now confirmed as eleven Intercept Class, three Class Two Troop Transports, fifteen Fighter Attack Class, Two Empire Destroyer Class and eight Heavy Cruiser Class. Siwa within weapons range of EarthForce vessels in two Earth minutes, eight Earth seconds, their flight time."

"I knew it!" Hassan shouted, "it seems we've flown straight into the whole EarthForce fleet! Can we get past them?"

"No chance, " Jorg replied, "they're spread out too much. Even at this velocity we would be in their weapons range." He re-checked the data on part of his console. "No - we'd just turn and be straight in their line of fire."

"Straight through, then."

"Only way - short of turning round. L9A - activate all weapons."

"All weapon systems already on-line, " L9A replied.

"Well, it was good, while it lasted," Jorg said, wryly smiling. "Better strap ourselves in, I suppose. And it was such a splendid ship."

"Message received, " L9A said, "from EarthForce vessel Vespasian. Displaying on screen."

The screen showed the imposing figure of an EarthForce General. "This is General Augustus Chang."

"L9A - terminate transmission," Jorg said.

"Transmission terminated," L9A replied.

"Well, do we have a plan?" Jorg asked Hassan.

"Increase velocity, straight toward them, firing all weapons."

"That's a plan?"

"You could show off some of your fancy flying."

"I thought you'd never ask. L9A - all navigation controls to manual."

"Warning, " L9A replied. "Manual navigation is not a recognized procedure at this velocity."

"L9A - override warning and set all navigation controls to manual."

"All navigation controls reset for manual control."

"L9A - disengage ship gravitational field."

"Warning, "L9A replied, " disengaging ship gravitational field is not a recognized procedure."

"L9A - override warning and disengage ship gravitational field."

"Ship gravitational field disengaged."

"Here we go then," Jorg said, tightening the straps on his seat harness.

His turn was sudden and fierce, and Hassan followed Jorg's example by tightening his own harness. Jorg executed another turn as they came within the weapons range of the EarthForce fleet. Cluster after cluster of disrupter shells were fired at them, and Hassan could see on the view screen the distant momentary flare of StarCanon after StarCanon being fired ship after ship after ship.

He himself laid a trail of self-replicating mines as Jorg weaved his way around and over and under EarthForce vessel after EarthForce vessel until Hassan felt sick from the sudden changes of direction and acceleration. Jorg would increase velocity, then suddenly decelerate until they were almost stopped, then turn and fastly accelerate again.

Hassan had not seen - nor heard of - anything like it, but he was soon too busy with targeting his weapons to notice anything else. He launched several ship-seeking disrupters, and saw his targets take swift evasive action as the disrupters locked onto them. The ships launched their counter measures, including disrupter-seeking-disrupters, and Hassan was not surprised when his console showed that two of his three disrupters had been destroyed. But the third evaded all counter measures and closed upon its target, a Destroyer Class ship.

Hassan felt no elation about the kill, and had to concentrate on his weapons console, and his own fight for survival, to remove from his mind the momentary image of part of a spaceship suddenly being ripped open and exposed to the stark deadly cold vacuum of deep Space. There would be a momentary pause, with perhaps a few bodies and living beings flushed into Space, before the immense explosion ripped the whole ship apart to leave nothing alive.

The explosion did not stop the EarthForce attack. Instead, the heavy ships ceased their firing to allow their Fighters and Interceptors to attack. Within moments the Siwa was engaged in a battle with all twenty-six EarthForce Fighters and Interceptors. The swarm of attacking ships was such that for a brief few seconds Hassan did not even have to aim his weapons. Wherever he fired, there seemed to be a target. He destroyed one, then two of the enemy ships which seemed to make them change their pattern of attack.

He was targeting a fastly closing Fighter when the Siwa shuddered, hit by enemy fire. The ship seemed to spiral out of control - but Hassan soon realized it was another of Jorg's tactics.

"Warning, " L9A announced, "vessel Siwa exceeding maximum synchron-drive capability. Synchron-drive iteration 11 will be attained in eleven seconds. Warning, vessel Siwa has exceeded maximum synchron-drive capability."

The attacking EarthForce vessels tried to follow, and several of them fired salvo after salvo from their StarCanons, but to no effect. They could match neither the velocity of the Siwa nor the flying skill of Jorg and it was only a few seconds before Jorg levelled out his ship, reduced the velocity to within design limits, and sped toward Earth at a reasonably safe synchron-iteration 10 leaving behind a trail of EarthForce dead.

## 5.

Moments later they were within sensor range of one of the military Earth stations just outside the orbit of Pluto. Not that it mattered to them anymore as the military had already scrambled fighters to intercept them, and Jorg delayed his deceleration until the Siwa was well inside Jupiter's orbit. He still maintained manual control, with gravity disengaged.

"Warning, " L9A announced, "three vessels on intercept course. Weapons lock detected. Warning. Two additional vessels detected on intercept course. Weapons lock detected."

"Do you see what I see?" Hassan asked Jorg.

"Probably not."

"Their attack pattern. Take a look on your console."

"Five ships - no, make that seven now. All closing fast."

"Warning," L9A announced, "hostile ships within weapons range in thirty-five seconds. Siwa defensive shields at maximum. Maintaining standard Stardrive iteration 2."

"Don't you see?" Hassan continued, "their attack pattern is purely two-dimensional. They're not thinking three-dimensionally."

"Got you! They're just blocking our way to Earth as if we're going straight there. Following the plane of planetary orbits."

"Indeed."

"Well then, let's give them something to think about! L9A - engage synchron-drive iteration 3."

"Synchron-drive engaged, iteration 3."

Jorg took the Siwa up away from the plane of Jupiter's orbit at a speed the intercepting fighters could not match. He spiralled the ship several times, then accelerated toward the Sun, following a sinusoidal pattern. He had turned the Siwa around the sun and down away from the plane of Earth's orbit before the intercepting fighters had regrouped and begun the chase.

A few spiralling turns later, Jorg decelerated sharply and lurched the Siwa directly toward Earth.

"You got the landing co-ordinates," Jorg asked Hassan.

"Landing co-ordinates entered."

"Got them! Here we go. How long do you reckon we've got on the surface?"

"Well, as a rough estimate I'd say about two minutes."

"That much, hey? I just hope your people are ready down there."

"They will be."

"If not, we'll have to lift off immediately."

"If so, I shall have to stay behind."

"If that's what you want."

"Yes. They will need help with the supplies we've brought."

"Don't tell me - these supplies are weapons, right?"

"Yes."

Jorg concentrated on his console, one screen of which showed an image of the target landing area overlaid with the Siwa's approach vectors.

"Warning, " L9A announced, "current landing approach velocity exceeds safety level."

"Remind me to re-programme this ship, " Jorg said. He increased the velocity a little, then levelled the Siwa out before steeply descending and beginning deceleration. "Any incoming?" he asked Hassan.

"Nothing detected. On my mark prepare to deploy cargo."

"On your mark."

"Mark!"

Jorg released the cargo bay doors, and shut down the magnetic field restraining their cargo. It fell toward the desert sands below which they could see in the view screen, now only a few thousand Earth metres below them. Then, as the Siwa continued its swift descent, Jorg recognized the type of buildings they were nearing, bathed as they were in the early morning light from Earth's Sun.

"Nice landing site - middle of a military base," he said. They were so close now he could see the feverish activity below as the military prepared to repel the Siwa. The base was not large, and its oblong, watch-tower guarded perimeter enclosed only a dozen or so squat buildings in addition to the two long military barracks.

"Incoming!" Hassan said. "They've launched missiles. Counter-measures away."

The military base was isolated, on the edge of a desert, and Jorg was momentarily distracted as the screen on his console which showed the ground below showed the desert sands erupting. But it was only the hidden armed supporters - Mujahideen - of the imprisoned leader throwing off the camouflage which had concealed them and scrambling forth from their sand trenches to assault the military base.

Jorg could not hear them, but had he been able to do so he would have heard the resounding and fearsome war cry of Allahu Akbar! as the warriors ran forward firing whatever weapons they possessed. Some had missiles, launched from shoulder balanced and ground based launchers, and Jorg saw several explosions inside the military base. He also saw warrior after warrior fall, cut down by military fire.

The landing site was some distance from where the main assault was taking place, and the Siwa had barely touched down before they were surrounded. But the rescue had been well-planned with intelligence gained over many weeks, and Hassan knew exactly where to target his weapons. Several fierce explosions followed.

"Two minutes, " Hassan said to Jorg as he threw off his harness and grabbed an assortment of weapons, including a curved-blade sword whose scabbard he slung over his back, warrior-style, ancient Earth. "If I'm not back - go!"

The sound of the air-lock venting was almost drowned out by the nearby explosions, and Hassan ran down the short landing ramp shooting at anything that moved. Nearby, buildings were on fire, but despite the smoke Hassan could see his objective, a small white building nestling between the two barracks.

He was strafed several times by incoming fire, but deftly zigzagged, evaded it, returned fire and was approaching the white building when a gaggle of men in military uniforms rushed from it. He was about to direct the fire of his two hand-held weapons toward them when he saw a black robed and bearded figure among them. They were hustling his leader away. Two turned their weapons on Hassan and he felt the grip of his left hand loosen although he felt no pain and did not bother to look at the wound the blast gun had caused. Then, in three swift bounds, he was among his enemy, right hand weapon re-holstered, sword-drawn. His first blow severed a head; his second sliced through an arm. The advanced weapons of his enemies were useless at such close quarters and they barely had time to turn and aim before a slicing, powerful sword thrust was upon them.

"Assalamu Alaikum. We must go!" he said in greeting to the leader as the last of his enemies toppled headless and blood-spurting to the ground.

The agility of the aged leader surprised Hassan and they ran back to the Siwa, reaching the air-lock just as strafing fire from military re-inforcements began. As soon as the air-lock was sealed, Jorg engaged synchron-drive.

He ignored L9A's warning and, although uncertain what would happen, blasted away from the ground. In an instant the Siwa had reached the edge of the Earth's atmosphere, its take-off causing a devastating blast wave which reduced the military base to ruins and threw both Hassan and the leader against the bulkheads.

"Warning, " L9A announced as they seared out away from the Earth. "Five hostile ships on intercept course, weapons lock detected."

As if they had anticipated his tactics, the Earth ships had positioned themselves in a three-dimensional formation and Hassan was barely in his seat at the weapons console when they began their attack run. He was about to begin deployment of Harratan clusters when Jorg fiercely decelerated, brought the Siwa to an almost dead stop then reversed course back into the Earth's atmosphere. There, he entered a standard if momentary orbit before launching the Siwa at synchron-drive iteration 3 straight toward the Sun, swerving away only moments before the Sun's gravity would have overpowered the ship. Then, at almost ninety degrees to the plane of Earth's orbit, he thrust the Siwa at its maximum iteration out from the Solar System.

Hassan's console showed no vessels following or in the near vicinity. For nearly half of an hour they both warily, and a little dazed, scanned their respective consoles as the Siwa hurtled them back toward Lam. Hassan was the first to break their silence.

"Just received a coded message from Lam," Hassan said. "Two of our ships will rendezvous with us in three solar hours at these co-ordinates." He fed them into his console. "They will escort us back to Lam. They report no Earth vessels between us and these co-ordinates. And, in case you're interested, they are heavy Battle Cruisers. It seems that Earth has indeed declared war on Lam. Or in the words of EarthGov, they are going to liberate Lam."

It was only then - and almost at the same time - that both Hassan and a Jorg looked around for the person they had rescued. He was lying on the deck of the bridge of the Siwa, unconscious as a result of his collision with the bulkhead during take-off. Re-engaging gravity, Hassan and Jorg carried him to the spare seat by the weapons console.

"I'm sure he will be alright, InshaAllah." Hassan said, retrieving the emergency portable medical scanner. "All Life-signs are fine. Just a minor concussion."

It was a happy Jorg who returned to his Pilots chair. For he would get his fifteen thousand kursums after all. And the beautiful Siwa.

## **Part Two**

### **Invasion**

#### **1.**

Jorg was overwhelmed and nearing exhaustion. It had taken them nearly three hours to walk the short distance to the dwelling of Malik Khattab from the Lam Spacedock, although the word *walk* was not correct. Pushed, pulled, might be more appropriate, for hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic people had gathered to greet them on their return. All Jorg could see were happy, smiling - often ecstatic, sometimes tearful - faces: of men, young and old, bearded and unbearded, of children of all ages, of women who were mostly swathed in black with a headscarf to cover their hair. Jorg had found himself being embraced by complete strangers, and his right hand, arm and wrist ached from the hundreds of hundreds of handshakes he had been given. One very elderly man, his back bent from age and illness and his eyes full of tears, had even kissed Jorg's hand.

The learned scholar they had rescued from Earth had tried to briefly speak to the crowd, but his words were unheard except by the few of the huddled, tightly-packed throng around them, and a semblance of order was only restored when, over two hours after their landing, over a dozen men in military uniforms - all smiling - surrounded Jorg, the scholar, Hassan and Malik and slowly - very slowly - ushered them through the tumultuous crowd.

Jorg had never experienced anything like this, and he was pleased when they finally reached a cool flower-scented courtyard in Malik's dwelling. But even there a small crowd greeted them until Malik, with the help of two soldiers, gently gestured for them all to leave. They did, except one: a young woman, swathed in the traditional black with a scarf covering her hair, who stood by one of the fountains intently staring at Jorg. He turned, saw her and for a few seconds they stood looking at each other until she lowered her head to swiftly move out of sight.

Then Jorg was being thanked by the learned scholar they had rescued, with Hassan translating his words. Jorg heard them both speaking, but the words seemed far away, and he was about to say something in response when a soldier entered the courtyard, spoke briefly to Malik, and left.

Malik conveyed the expected news of the quickly approaching Earth invasion force. Then, speaking to Jorg, he said:

"I expect you will wish to leave as soon as possible. For Eridani."

"Well, " Jorg replied, still overwhelmed by the crowd scenes but most of all by the beauty of the young woman's face, "maybe I can help. I've got an idea."

"Yes?"

"Maybe I can persuade some members of our Guild to fight against EarthForce."

"Well - "

"I know it's a wild idea, but I'd like to try. You could surely use any allies you can get."

"That is most certainly true."

"So, I take it I can take the *Siwa*?"

"Most certainly!" Malik replied. "It is your ship, now."

"Just checking!" He turned toward Hassan. "I expect you've got other things to do."

Before replying, Hassan looked at Malik, who smiled, and nodded his head in answer to the unspoken question. "In your ship?" Hassan asked Jorg.

"Sure!"

"If I may interrupt, " Malik said. "Hassan, there is another ship available, should you wish to use it. Although the Khan 2 is an old ship, it's recently been modified. Synchron-drive, of course."

Hassan was amazed. "But isn't that your own vessel?" Hassan knew it was: a veteran of earlier Lam-Earth conflicts.

"I'm needed here. So, that is settled then. I shall make all the necessary arrangements."

## 2.

The flight to the Space Pirate port in the Eridani system was uneventful, except for the constant space chatter on most communication channels concerning the advancing Earth forces, and the imminent invasion of Lam.

The Khan 2 was an impressive ship: space black and five times the size of the *Siwa* with superior weapons. Designed for at least a crew of three - not to mention a troop of Space Marines - Hassan was fully occupied in piloting and monitoring it. He had not expected to be offered any crew, and was not, for he knew all available personnel would be needed to staff the fleet of starships and fighters which would soon be dispatched to defend Lam. Desperate times, he knew: a thought which blunted his pride in piloting Lam's most renowned starship.

In complete contrast to Lam Spacedock, the docking facilities on Eridani 3 were large, and apparently chaotic. Ships landed and ascended without any permission, often weaving out of each other's way at the last moment. There was also no central control or even security of any kind, and the gangways, gantries, and numerous landing pads and loading bays seemed haphazardly placed, which indeed they were, having been built when needed and wherever possible. In addition, almost half of one side of the Spacedock was given over to facilities for rest and recreation, it being well-known that most kinds of recreation - forbidden or illegal elsewhere and especially on Earth - were available, which undoubtedly accounted for the noise, mayhem and hundreds of people who, gathered in groups, or alone, thronged in, out and around the various establishments densely packed together behind a vast open concourse seething with people every hour of the planet's thirty-hour day.

Outside the Spacedock, it was raining, as it often did on Eridani 3: droplets of purple-black rain bringing back to the ground the often noxious material spewed regularly forth from the many active volcanoes and land-ruptures which riddled the planet.

Whatever Hassan had imagined or expected would happen on their arrival, it was not what actually did. Jorg stood in the centre of the concourse, atop a small metallized container, and fired the blast rifle he was carrying, several times. A small crowd gathered, which steadily enlarged.

"Most of you know me, " Jorg said in what Hassan found was a surprisingly loud and resonant voice. "You - Nils," and he pointed at a large, muscular man, whose face was festooned with tattoos. "And you - Deneb, scourge of the Ponderlings."

Deneb laughed, showing her Khursum-capped sharpened canine teeth. Most people near to her also laughed, some out of nervousness. For she had a fearsome reputation as a fighter, which reputation her shaved head, military style clothing and grim if beautiful green eyes certainly enhanced. Not to mention the two blast pistols she always carried, in holsters hung from a waist belt, and the small fighting sword slung over her back.

"As you all know, EarthForce is heading our way."

"No they're not!" someone shouted. "They're going to Lam."

"Yes, Lam first. Do you really expect them to stop there? Do you really expect the authoritarian government of Earth to let us continue to trade in the manner we have become accustomed to?

"Have any of you been watching their news channels recently? The statements about 'making Space safe for ordinary citizens'? EarthForce wants all this," and he dramatically gestured toward the landing bays behind him. "

"What's your point?" someone else shouted.

"We join forces with Lam and fight EarthForce. You - Nils: you're always going on about wanting to fight, large-scale. Well, here's your chance!"

"It's not our problem," someone said. "Let those Lamian lamies fight their own battle."

"Don't you understand? It will be our problem, and soon."

"There's nothing in it for us," the first objector said.

"Yes there is! If we help them, they will help us. Synchron-drive mean anything to you? Now, how would it be if you all got ships with them? Imagine the difference! Imagine the trade, the profit, the possibilities! You all know Lam, its people. We may not trust each other - at least not much! - but you can trust them."

"Just suppose, " Deneb said, "some of us agree. What's your plan?"

"Join up with the Lam forces - now! Wait for the Earth invasion fleet; ambush them. Start battle. Simple really. So, it's warriors this way: cowards and the tame to stay here." He stared intently at Deneb, and then at Nils. "I take it you two won't be staying here then."

Deneb slowly walked toward him, her face betraying no emotion. The whole crowd waited, expectant. Then she laughed and in one swift movement pulled him down from his makeshift podium and briefly embraced him. Then she laughed again. And most of the crowd laughed too, or cheered, or made not quite human noises.

Deneb turned round, and addressed the crowd. "Get word out that we're going. EarthForce is our enemy, well all know that. As Flyer Jorg said, warriors this way; cowards stay here!"

"You'll have to marry her, now!" Nils joked as most of the crowd dispersed to follow Jorg and Deneb toward the docking bays.

Quickly, Hassan caught up with Jorg. "About what you said - "

"Ah yes. I shall leave that in your capable hands. You can securely contact your friend, Malik, I presume?"

"Yes."

"Good."

"But - "

"Only option."

"Maybe. By the way - Ponderlings?"

"Ah yes! One of those recreation places back there. She only goes there to pick a fight. Your type of woman, maybe!"

Hassan smiled, awkwardly and tried not to look at Deneb. He failed. She was slightly ahead now of Jorg and seemingly eager to get to her ship.

### 3.

The small Pirate fleet was soon on its way, although - once in Space - it took nearly an hour for the Pirates to agree among themselves which way, and where, they should go and what tactics they should use once they were within range of the invasion force. Everyone on the small Pirate fleet of seventeen ships had their own opinion, and Hassan, although initially amused by this, was beginning to get slightly annoyed. Twice he had tried to get them to use secure communication channels, and twice he was ignored. So they argued, and he was about to turn them all off to watch the latest news broadcasts from Earth when Deneb's face appeared on one of his communication screens.

"Now listen here, you lot!" she shouted, grim-faced again. Instantly, the ship to ship chatter stopped. "No debate! We follow Flyer Jorg. Only way this is going to work! Every battle force needs a chief. Anyone who does not like this - " and she paused, for what seemed a long time but it was only a few seconds - " can go back now." Then she smiled. "Although if he fails us, he'll have me to answer to!"

Hassan saw some of the Pirates smile, and heard some faint laughter. "You got that, Hassan?" she said directly to him. "Bet you were getting a bit worried there, right?"

"No," he lied. Again he tried to avoid looking at her.

"I'm switching over to secure," she said. "Sending you the codes now."

"Got them. Secured. Go ahead."

"You've made the arrangements then?" she asked.

"Synchron-drive ships?"

"Yes."

"The deal is agreed."

"Superb! Heard about your fighting prowess, by the way."

Hassan was surprised. "Really?"

"Few secrets in Space."

"So it would seem."

"We'll get together - you and me - when we get back," Deneb said.

"Yes," he said, without thinking, and was about to correct himself when she closed the comlink.

He thought of calling her, then decided against it; then changed his mind, then changed it again. He settled the matter by switching links to watch the broadcast from *PlanetEarth News*.

"Today's news is brought to you by MarsCorp: Developers of the Mare Sirenum Homesteads. Dreamt about starting a new life? Well, now you can, courtesy of MarsCorp.

"Breaking news: the President of EarthGov speaking at the FiftySecond Conference held in memory of the victims of the Alexandria massacre, said that those terrorists intent on destabilizing Earth and its allies would not succeed."

"Fellow Citizens of Earth. Today may well be a turning point in our history. As Earth President I have today issued a Presidential order authorizing our military forces to take whatever action they consider necessary to find those responsible for the recent attacks on Earth.

"In the latest terrorist incident, a military base in the Egyptian Protectorate was attacked by off-world terrorists. Over one hundred and thirty military personnel were killed. The terrorists responsible escaped back to their base on the planet Lam where they were accorded a hero's welcome by the Khattab regime.

"We must be under illusions. Our very way of life is under attack. The people responsible for these attacks must know that they will find no hiding place. We will hunt them down, wherever they are, and bring them to justice."

Angry, Hassan turned the broadcast off. He had no time to dwell on the matter further.

"Warning. Hostile ships on intercept. Weapons lock detected. Warning. Hostile ships on intercept. Weapons lock detected."



His scanner confirmed the alarm and he opened a comlink to Jorg. "EarthForce recon ships," he said to Jorg.

"I know. Four in total. No, make that five."

"They're slowing."

"They're no match for all of us," Jorg said, and smiled.

"Seems they agree. They're heading back. Anything on your distance sensors?"

"Not yet. Guess we've lost the element of surprise."

Hassan thought of making a comment about secure communications but - knowing the defiant individuality of the Pirates - decided to keep quiet. He was calculating the time to intercept of the Earth invasion fleet, based on their last known position, when his own distance sensor alarm sounded. Jorg was the first to respond, calling on all the Pirate fleet to switch to secure communications, which - to Hassan's surprise - they did.

"Right," Jorg said using an open secure comlink to the small band of Pirate ships, "they know we're coming. I'm sending the attack plan. May Fortune favour us."

"Looks like, " Hassan said to Jorg, "they've got a few reinforcements since we engaged them last. I count 23 Intercept class fighters, 3 Empire Destroyer Class, 5 Class 2 Troop Transports. Not to mention the 15 Fighter Attack class and 8 Heavy Cruisers."

"My kind of odds! You ready? And did you remember to reprogram your ship?"

"Yes. InshaAllah. Engaging synchron-drive - now!"

The Siwa and the Khan2 quickly left the small Pirate fleet behind, and it was only a few moments before they were close to their prey.

"Weapons lock detected. Khan2 within weapons range of EarthForce vessels in sixteen Earth seconds, our flight time."

"Khan2 - set all navigation controls to manual."

"All navigation controls reset for manual control."

"Khan2 - disengage ship gravitational field."

"Warning, " Khan2 replied, " disengaging ship gravitational field is not a recognized procedure."

"Khan2 - override warning and disengage ship gravitational field."

"Ship gravitational field disengaged. Khan2 now within weapons range of EarthForce vessels"

Using their superior velocity, the Khan2 and the Siwa began weaving in, out and around the EarthForce fleet, laying self-replicating mines. The invasion Fleet scattered, and Hassan tried to follow Jorg's almost reckless example of sudden deceleration followed by spiralling turns and extreme acceleration but failed, even once almost losing control of his ship. But he did manage to avoid the impending collision with one of the Troop Transports. So he contented himself with doing the best he could, which did seem sufficient to evade the EarthForces Fighters and Interceptors who chased them, firing their StarCanons. He saw one Earth Fighter explode; then another, caught by Jorg's returning fire. Then all the Fighters and Interceptors withdrew to leave the whole of the invasion Fleet free to fire at the Siwa and Khan2.

Wave upon wave of enemy fire came toward them, from all directions, but to no avail, prompting the return of the Fighters and Interceptors, and Hassan hardly had time to target his weapons and launch his disrupters at the large Earth vessels so engaged was he in avoiding their weapons fire.

Then the Pirates joined the battle. Ship chasing ship. StarCanon after StarCanon firing. Ship-seeking Disrupters seeking targets to destroy. Disrupters to evade. Counter-measures launched, with disrupters destroyed in brilliant, multi-coloured displays that illuminated the dark ships twisting, turning, accelerating. Calm, on-board automated alarms; human sighs, cries of relief, victory. And within it all, human death, EarthForce and Pirate.

Hassan was in trouble. Five EarthForce ships - three Fighters and two Interceptors - had targeted and locked onto him. Whatever he did, they pursued, relentlessly, forming their attack patterns in an attempt to trap him, anticipating as they did his own pattern of attack and evasion. Even his superior velocity seemed to be working against him, for one or more of the ships would seem to withdraw only to move to where they expected his next acceleration would take him. His only option seemed to be to attack them one by one, but even this failed. They were learning fast, twisting, decelerating, forming defensive patterns that left him open to attack if he closed close enough to target one of them and lock his own weapons.

Suddenly, his ship spiralled out of control, hit by a burst of EarthForce fire.

"Warning. Helm control lost."

The ships' forward momentum was carrying it straight into the path of three EarthForce Fighters. Hassan could do nothing. Then Deneb's ship was in front of him, firing, weaving around the Fighters. One, two, were hit and exploded leaving the remaining one to retreat, pursued by Deneb herself.

But Hassan was adrift, and could only watch, and listen, as the Khan2 sailed helplessly and fastly away from the battle. No one, nothing, followed. Once, twice, he heard Deneb shout a warning, and once he thought he heard Jorg's voice among the babble of voices, as he saw one section of one of the Earth Destroyers explode to leave the whole vessel tumbling, tumbling and spewing debris into Space. He watched as - at last - the ships from Lam joined the battle, and explosion and implosion, one after the other, signalled the death of another ship whose Space-cold memorial fragments would endure for thousands upon thousands of years, drifting as they would through the almost empty darkness. Twice, three times, he tried to communicate, with Jorg, Deneb - anyone - and twice, three times, he failed. Only his life-support seemed to function correctly, and the ships' momentum had carried it far away from the now invisible battle when he began the task of trying to restore some sort of communication or helm-control.

But he was no engineer, and he was wondering what to do next when a still functioning alarm sounded.

"Warning. Hostile vessel on intercept course. Weapons lock detected."

He remembered nothing else, and awoke to find himself lying on the bare floor of a brightly lit bare room composed from some sort of metallized material he did not recognize.

#### 4.

There was nothing left to do but leave. The battle had been ferocious, and deadly, but the Pirates - and even the fast ships of Lam - were no match for the heavily armed Earth Cruisers. Not one of the attacking forces got close, so dense and accurate was their returning fire. And Earth re-inforcements kept arriving. One, two, four Fighters destroyed, and two would arrive to replace them, launched by a heavily protected Imperial Carrier safely distant from the battle. Neither the Pirates nor the Lam forces had any reserves.

It had become clear to Jorg, even before the few Lam ships that remained announced their departure, that the Pirates must retreat. Or rather, what remained of them. Jorg counted five ships and he did not expect the invasion Fleet to follow them as they did not. Instead, they carried on toward Lam to face what he felt must surely be a desperate attempt to stop their invasion. For a moment, he thought of his new friend Malik Khattab, then of the beautiful young woman he had seen in the courtyard, and then of Hassan, scouring the massive battle debris with sensor probes for any traces of Hassan's ship. But it was a hopeless task, with so much advanced technology reduced to shattered fragments, large and small. He scanned ahead and around for the slight traces made by a synchron-drive ship but could find only those heading back toward Lam and contented himself with believing Hassan was there, among the few Lam ships heading back toward their home. Several times he sent a coded message to the Khan2 and each time there was no reply.

He, like the other survivors, did not want to talk and the five remaining Pirate ships made their quiet way back to the Spacedock on Eridani 3. There, there would be questions, he knew, and accusations, and he, expecting the worst, made sure when he landed that his blast pistol was fully charged and ready. They were waiting for him, as he disembarked: Nils, Deneb, Loz and Lacus. Behind them, on the concourse, a crowd was already forming and he caught sight of several people holding blast rifles.

But before he reached them the sound and sight of five other ships landing caused everyone - Jorg included - to turn around. His concern they were EarthForce ships, somehow undetected by him and others, dissolved the moment he saw them. Everyone waited, expectant, for their pilots to disembark.

"You must be Jorg Nansen," the tall, bearded leader of the group said. He, like his companions, wore the green military uniform of Lam.

"Yes, I am."

"I am Hussain and those - " he gestured toward the sleek, black synchron-drive ships, "are for you."

"Me?"

"Our bargain with you. You remember your deal with our leader, Malik Khattab?"

"Yes, yes of course. But the invasion. Won't you need them?"

"A word of honour is a word of honour." Unexpectedly, he turned toward what had become a large crowd. "These, " and he gestured toward where Jorg was standing beside Nils and Deneb, "are brave people. Warriors. Stories shall be told about the deeds they did today." Then turning back toward Jorg, he said, "Now, if you will excuse us, we must get back."

Our leader has asked me to convey to you our sincerest thanks, and our apologies that he could not offer you more ships. But considering the circumstances, I am sure you understand."

"Yes, of course."

"Here, " Hussain said as he handed Jorg several data-crystals, "are the activation codes. Now, I must return."

A sixth ship had landed and the other Lam pilots walked toward it.

"And Hassan?" Jorg asked Hussain. "Any news? I presume he went back to Lam."

"No, we have not heard from him." Hussain turned to go.

"May Fortune favour you."

Hassan smiled, said something in reply that Jorg could not hear, and rejoined his companions.

"What do we do now," Nils asked as the ship departed.

"I for one," Loz said, "am taking my ship and getting out of here."

"And I," said Lacus, "am taking mine to the highest bidder."

"Would that be EarthForce, by any small chance?" Deneb asked, stepping between the two men. Lacus was slightly taller than her, but not as grim-faced, and in imitation of the Earth Pirates of legend, wore a large gold earring as well as a colourful bandana. In contrast, Loz was shorter but more muscular and had been known, on occasion, to smile. Both, like most of the Space Pirates, carried blast rifles.

"Any objection?" Lacus said.

"Yes!"

"I've earned it!" Lacus replied. "I can do what I like with it." Slowly, he unslung his blast rifle from his shoulder.

"True," Deneb said. "But if you do that, I'll kill you."

Lacus laughed, but it was a strained, nervous laugh.

"And," Jorg interrupted, "if she doesn't, I will."

Lacus looked briefly at Jorg, then at Deneb, whose right hand was poised above one of her blast pistols.

"Hey, come on!" Loz said as he stepped between Deneb and Lacus. Turning toward Jorg he said, "What's the objection?"

"EarthForce!" Deneb replied, almost spitting the words out.

"There are just, " Jorg said, "some people you do not deal with, especially after what happened today."

"Yeah, whatever you say," Loz replied, trying to smile first at Jorg and Deneb, and then at Lacus. "We won't, but we sure are getting out of here. Aren't we Lacus?"

Lacus was already walking toward one of the black synchron-drive ships, and Jorg did not have to say anything for Deneb to understand what he meant. She looked at Jorg for a second before slightly nodding her head in silent agreement to his thought.

## **Part Three**

### **Capture**

#### **1.**

Hassan had a long wait under the bright intense lights. He guessed that the clear section of the curved ceiling contained surveillance cameras and had spent what seemed to him a long time viewing the section from different angles in the hope of seeing something; anything, to relieve the monotony of the bright whiteness of what he assumed was some kind of Ship based holding cell, and he was almost glad when a section of one of the slightly curved walls opened to reveal five heavily armed EarthForce troopers, SpaceVizors shielding their faces, standing in a less brightly lit corridor.

He rushed toward them, but they were prepared and he found himself thrown to the floor with three blast rifles pointed at him. Two of the troopers dragged him along the corridor to another bright, clinical, room and pushed him down onto

a padded bench where his legs, arms and neck were tightly restrained by metallic bands.

"We have some questions for you," a voice beside him said.

Hassan could see only the ceiling, such were the restraints, although he found he could move his head slightly and to the left. He saw one EarthForce officer and two other men dressed in some sort of white uniform he had never seen before, and there was something about their faces, their manner, that Hassan did not like. It was as if they were devoid of human feeling.

"I have nothing to say," Hassan replied.

"We know all about you, Hassan Zahr," the EarthForce officer said.

"Only Allah knows all about me, " Hassan said, and smiled.

"You can make this easy for yourself, or you can make this difficult."

" I have nothing to say."

"We shall see. Your first lesson, for understand that you are now powerless."

The two men in white uniforms came toward him, holding instruments in their hands, and whatever Hassan expected, it was not what happened. Roughly, but methodically, they shaved off his beard, in defiance of Hassan's way of life, which commanded that adult males should not shave the hair from their faces. The action by his interrogators - for that is what Hassan assumed they were - was a calculated insult both to himself, and the beliefs of his people.

"Anything to say, now?" The EarthForce officer asked him.

"Paradise is surrounded by hardships and the Hell-Fire is surrounded by temptations."

"I see." The Officer gestured to the interrogators who cut away Hassan's clothing, leaving him completely naked.

It was another calculated insult, and Hassan was thinking of a reply when he felt something being attached to his hands and feet.

"As I said, Hassan Zahr, you can make this easy for yourself, or difficult. The choice is yours. I require the activation codes of your vessel. I require details of the strength of your forces on Lam. I require names of the terrorists you know. One way or another, you will tell me."

"You are a very brave man, aren't you?"

The pain was like nothing Hassan had ever experienced before.

"This is only the beginning," the EarthForce Officer said, his pale face betraying no emotion.

"What your heart desires and your eyes delight in will be there in that Garden of Paradise you can inherit through your deeds in your life in this world."

"I see. Very well then, Hassan Zahr."

Hassan did not know how long the pain, and the questions lasted, but he found himself drifting toward sleep, or what he assumed was sleep, although it was in fact unconsciousness brought about by the trauma of his interrogation. They left him then, for a while, only to return and repeat their questions, and when he did not answer, or say anything, they injected him with drugs of various kinds.

Hassan did not know whether he said anything under their influence, and if he did, what he said, when he awoke to find himself back in his cell. He was still naked, and every time he tried to stand, he fell over. He was lying on the floor, thinking of what he might do when he felt the room judder. For an instant he did not know what it was, then he believed he did, for he heard, even in his cell, the alarms that meant Battle Stations. A smile of pleasure briefly overcame the pain he felt.

## 2.

The once beautiful courtyard of his dwelling on Lam had been reduced to rubble, and Malik Khattab, surrounded by seven heavily-armed soldiers, was on his knees, moving stones and bricks. The bombardment from the EarthForce ships and fighters had been intense, and he, together with the soldiers, had spent several minutes, Lamian time, searching the rubble for Malik's daughter, Ruqayyah. They did not find her.

"Please, Sheikh, we must leave now," one of the soldiers said, and reluctantly Malik agreed.

The scene outside was one of devastation and carnage. Rubble, and bodies - of women, soldiers, and children - lay everywhere, and only one building was untouched. The Founders Monument, with its gold dome and skyward reaching minarets, had become a temporary shelter for the few people who remained in the city, and Malik was threading his way slowly toward it, over rubble, when a young soldier ran toward him.

"Assalamu Alaikum. The ships are ready to leave now," the bearded young man said.

"Alaikum Salaam," Malik replied. "Then, InshaAllah, it is time to go."

The Lam SpacePort had been among the first targets of the EarthForce bombing, and what remained of the Lam ships, nine in all, were gathered on the desert sands outside of the city. The people surrounding them were surprisingly calm, considering that the majority of them would have to be left behind. Women and children said farewell to their husbands and fathers; mothers said farewell to their sons, and steadily, but slowly, a long procession of armed men and boys - Mujahideen - thousand upon thousand, headed off into the intense brightness and heat of the desert, some walking beside Camels, others herding goats.

Malik had intended to say some words to the large crowd who had gathered near the ships, but when he reached them, and walked through them, they made it clear by their smiles, their demeanour, that words were unnecessary. Men, old and young, greeted him with Salaams and shook his hand, and it seemed a long time to him before he reached the sand footsteps of the Mujahideen, but it was only a few Lamian minutes, and he and those with him followed these footsteps to a pass that rose steadily toward the nearby mountains.

He stood for a while on a slight rocky ridge overlooking the city. Behind him, the city was in ruins, the smoke from the many fires carried quickly away by the desert wind. In front of him lay the empty expanse of desert that covered most of the planet. Sand, sand dunes, rocky outcrops and, in places, vast ranges of both high and low mountains, barren of all life. It reminded Malik, and many others who had been there, of Earth's Western Desert between the Qatar Depression and the Great Sand Sea except that the mountains of Lam were, in many places, larger and higher.

He waited to watch the ships depart and for the people who remained to leave. Some - more than half - headed into the desert, following various tracks and paths, while the others walked back into the city. He did not know how long it would be before the soldiers of EarthForce arrived to occupy what remained of the city but he did not really care. Sooner, or later, he knew, InshaAllah, that it would make little difference. The battle for Lam - for the way of life of his people - would continue, as he and others had planned it would. In some ways, he thought, it would be good to be out in the desert, living as he knew his own ancestors on Earth had lived, two or more centuries ago; in other ways, he expected it would be hard, with water far scarcer than it was in the deserts of Earth.

Hours of wearying walking later, as the sun was descending, he arrived at the first of the temporary desert camps where a rocky almost half circular quite high escarpment, many miles long, stood as if guarding the hundreds of miles of sand dunes that lay beyond. He spent one Lamian hour wandering among his men, nearly a thousand strong in this one camp alone, greeting them, making sure everything was in order, and, when the time for prayer arrived, announced as it was according to tradition, he - like the others, facing the Land of the Two Holy Places on Earth - stood, and knelt, with them, shoulder to shoulder while some of the Mujahideen, around the camp's perimeter and on the escarpment, guarded them, watching for enemies.

His home that night was a makeshift tent, shared with three other Mujahideen, dressed in suitable desert attire, and it might have been a scene from Earth's desert history except for the small, but sophisticated, communications console that stood on a table in one corner. From this he received coded reports which informed him of the safe departure and landing of the nine ships, and of the arrival of EarthForce troops.

Briefly, he watched a broadcast from *PlanetEarth News*:

Although the whereabouts of the terrorist leader Malik Khattab - wanted for Crimes Against Humanity - are unknown at this time, a representative of EarthGov, General Marcus, speaking exclusively to PlanetEarth News, said it was only a matter of time before he was caught and brought to justice.

"He shall find no hiding place. We shall hunt him down and are offering a reward of twenty million Kursums for information that will lead to his capture."

At a recent news conference, the Chief of the Department of Earth Security said that EarthForce troops had apprehended an important terrorist leader. Hassan Zahr, a resident of Lam, was currently being interrogated at an undisclosed location. Zahr is implicated in the recent massacre of over one hundred and fifty people in the Egyptian Protectorate.

Breaking News! Troops from the elite EarthForce have landed and taken control of Lam. A Provisional government, headed by Musa Raja, is due to be announced soon. In a new development, the President of EarthGov said he expected EarthForce troops to seize control of the Eridani system as the outlaws there had been providing support and assistance for the terrorists on Lam.

Overhead, Malik could hear the sound of several EarthForce ships.

### 3.

Jorg, Deneb and Nils had soon left the Eridani system, stealthily following Loz and Lacus, and they were not surprised when their onboard ship sensors detected several EarthForce vessels on the course Loz and Lacus had taken.

"Your plan?" Deneb asked Jorg in a coded transmission.

"How many Earth ships do you register?"

"Five."

"Good enough odds to me! But you know what our priority is."

"Yes!" Deneb replied. It was almost a shout, and her face showed that determination, that lust for fighting, that scared many people, but interested others.

"Seems they've detected us," Nils interrupted, as the ships of Loz and Lacus suddenly increased their velocity.

They almost made it. The EarthForce ships were almost within weapons range when Deneb struck. Accelerating, she positioned herself between Loz and Lacus and the EarthForce ships, directly in their line of fire. Loz fired first; then Lacus, but they missed, and by the time Deneb began her own attack run - straight toward them - she was already in weapons range of the EarthForce ships.

But Nils and Jorg reacted at the same time, swerving away toward the EarthForce ships and firing at them as soon as they were within weapons range. It worked, for the five EarthForce ships broke away to engage them leaving Deneb to skillfully turn several times, avoiding the fire of Loz and Lacus, and fire all her weapons. One after the other, the ships of Loz and Lacus exploded, and she was soon weaving in and out of the EarthForce vessels, firing at any target she could.

One EarthForce ship was hit, and disabled, while the others regrouped, and Jorg was preparing for another attack run when Nils interrupted.

"Four more Earth ships approaching. Estimated arrival time, five Earth minutes."

"Best make ourselves scarce, then" Jorg suggested.

"Shame, " Deneb replied. "I was just beginning to enjoy myself."

"I guess a return to Eridani is out of the question," Nils asked.

"Certainly," Jorg replied. "EarthForce will be there soon, I guess."

"The colony on Seti Prime?"

"Sounds good to me," Nils said. Seti Prime was another Space Pirate haunt, right on the fringes of explored Space.

"You go. I'll meet you there. I have something to do on Lam."

"I'll go with you," Deneb said.

He could see her, on his screen, smiling. "Thanks. But this is something I've got to do by myself. EarthForce are probably there already."

"May Fortune favour you," Deneb said.

As soon as Jorg arrived in the vicinity of Lam he detected a whole multitude of Earth ships, mostly swarming near the planet, but with many in orbit. Using his superior velocity, and his skills as a pilot, he weaved through and past them, and he was already decelerating for a landing at a precise location in the city before they reacted with several EarthForce fighters chasing him.

He had not expected such devastation and it took him a few moments after landing, and in the dimming light as the Lamian star set, before he knew which direction to go. Nearby, he could hear the sound of dull explosions, and twice he thought he heard someone shout. Blast rifle ready, he cautiously entered what had once been Malik Khattab's dwelling. Finding nothing, he was about to leave when he almost tripped over the hand, protruding from some rubble. He found her, then, the beautiful young woman whose face, whose smile, had haunted him for days. But she was dead, her body crushed, and for the first time in his life Jorg felt tears moisten his eyes.

Then he was angry. So angry he began to shake. The noise saved him, and he leapt up and spun round to see several

EarthForce troopers nearby. Even had his anger not roused him he would have killed them, but he would not have run toward them as he did, screaming an incoherent, almost animal, cry. One of them did manage to fire a weapon, but it missed. Jorg did not.

His landed vessel had been detected, for five EarthForce fighter ships swooped down toward it, strafing the ground with their cannons. Jorg was soon airborne, and, even more reckless than usual, let them chase him into the desert where he weaved between hills and mountains and flew perilously close to the sands before rising vertically at incredible velocity to reach the darkness of Space. They followed, but he turned back and straight toward them until, one after the other, they exploded or fell, fatally hit, back to the planet.

#### 4.

It did not take Jorg long to find Nils and Deneb on Seti Prime. Disembarking on a concourse similar to but smaller than that on Eridani, he saw what seemed to be a fracas ahead. Before his arrival, a small crowd, some twenty strong, had gathered as news of the deaths of Loz and Lacus spread, and the crowd had reached the entrance to an establishment in where loud music played, people laughed, and Deneb and Nils sat, eating. Deneb, as usual, was in no mood for making speeches, or explaining herself, and she stood to defiantly face the crowd who instinctively backed away.

She had assumed the worst for, as Jorg cautiously approached, blast rifle unslung from his shoulder, he heard one of the crowd - a tall man with a shaven head, tattooed arms and neck - ask Deneb, "Is truth that Earth has taken Eridani?"

Jorg could see that Deneb's hands were still near her blast pistols. "Flyer Jorg should know," she said, and the crowd turned toward him.

"Well," he said, "on my way here my sensors picked up EarthForce ships orbiting Eridani 3. So I guess so."

"Are we next?" someone else asked.

"Could be. But not for a while, at least. Seems to me they'd need more ships, from Earth."

An elderly man with white hair stepped forward and introduced himself. He wore the one piece drably-coloured working clothing that Jorg associated with new settlers. "I'm Yukio Aida, and I speak for the settlers, here. Is there anything we can do?"

"It depends," Jorg, said, "on whether you want EarthGov to take control of this planet and the other colonies nearby."

"We came here to get away from them!" someone shouted.

"Too true!" another replied.

"As I see it, " Jorg said, surprised that he seemed to have become some kind of respected authority figure, "you all have three choices. Stay here, and accept the authority of EarthGov."

"We all know what that means!" someone shouted.

"Yeah, taxes, restrictions, deportations, military rule," another voice answered.

"Or," continued Jorg, "you can leave and try find somewhere else."

"There is nowhere else - not within thirty light years," Yukio said.

"And we all know what happened to the ships that went there. They never returned," a female voice said to a chorus of whisperings and murmurs.

"Or," Jorg said, "you can fight."

"With what?" Yukio said. "Most of the people here are settlers."

"We could help," the tattooed man said. He stepped forward and introduced himself to Jorg by the Earth custom of shaking hands. "Chiwetel."

"Yeah, I've heard of you. Aren't you the one who held that Earth passenger transport for ransom a while back?"

"That's I! I - we, " and he pointed to a group of rough looking men, "am getting bored. Action do us no harm! If the price be right."

"That's up to the settlers."

"What else can these people do but fight?" Yukio said, and shrugged his shoulders. "All these settlers have is here. You would help?" he asked Jorg.

"Yes, we will!" Deneb interrupted.

"Are you all agreed then," Jorg asked the crowd, "that fighting is the only option?"

"What chance do we have?" Yukio asked.

"Yeah, look what happened when you attacked EarthForce from Eridani," someone said.

"That was an all-out battle; this time, it will be on our terms. Ambush. Guerilla tactics. Cut their supply lines. Mine the approaches to Seti. That sort of thing. And," he added with a glance at Chiwetel, "we might even make a few raids of our own and hold some ships for ransom."

Chiwetel smiled. A smile that seemed to extend to the whole of his face.

"Seems to me, " the hitherto silent Nils said, "this is where we draw the line. Where we make a stand against EarthGov."

Jorg spent the rest of the daylight hours on Seti - whose clear turquoise sky, bluish sun, purple oceans, verdant plains and valleys, had attracted thousands of off-world settlers - on the concourse, with Deneb and Nils, talking to and meeting with settlers and anyone else who wanted to get involved in the defence of Seti Prime. Yukio surprised him, for, despite his apparent settler status, his advancing years and small stature - at least when compared to Jorg, Chiwetel, Nils and the other Space Pirates - he set about organizing things for Jorg with great energy, repeating going off to find someone to do one task, or ask their opinion, or procure some piece of equipment or weaponry, as well as talk with a large number of people and make suggestions.

He even managed to get the majority of the settlers and the Pirates to agree on what should be done, and who should do it, all - as Yukio himself suggested - under the guidance and leadership of Jorg. And it was Yukio who went around telling everyone of Jorg's latest exploit on Lam, news of which had reached Seti shortly after Jorg's arrival. Jorg did not know whether he should be pleased that EarthGov had just offered a million Kursums reward for his capture, although he did notice - as news of the reward spread on Seti - that Deneb and Nils had acquired more weapons and sat beside him, one on either side, at the communications console that Yukio had somehow managed to procure. He was later to learn that Yukio had, in his early years and on one of the colonies on Mars, run quite a profitable business smuggling banned goods to Earth, and that he had been detained on one of the notorious death-camps - or "re-education centres" as EarthGov called them - on the dark side of the Moon from which he had escaped to begin a new life.

With arrival of night, and more Space Pirates who had been lurking in Space awaiting developments - the places of recreation that bordered the Spaceport concourse became centres of lively, often noisy, activity, and at last Jorg found time to eat. He also found that he had acquired three more bodyguards all of whom, along with blast pistols and rifles, carried on their backs a large, curved sword, and all of whom wore white headbands inscribed with writing that, he was also later to learn, was that of Yukio's ancestral homeland on Earth.

"And Hassan?" Deneb asked, after they had all finished eating. All, that is, except Jorg's three new bodyguards who stood, resolute, near Jorg while he, Deneb, Nils and Yukio sat on a plinth beside a table in one of the less noisy places.

"We don't even know where he is," Jorg said.

"I may be able to help, there," Yukio interrupted, and stood up. "Give me a while."

"Why am I not surprised," Jorg said, after Yukio had left to consult with some of the settlers who had arrived with him from Proxima.

## 5.

The ship that held Hassan had been damaged in the attack which Jorg, Nils and Deneb had made during their pursuit of Loz and Lacus, and he was transferred, naked and wearing a restraining collar that could send a debilitating electric shock through his body, to another EarthForce vessel. There, it was not long before his interrogation resumed. He was restrained on a metallic table in complete darkness with some sort of device attached to his head. He did not know what this device did, or was supposed to do, but he knew he kept feeling nauseous and that unbidden images kept appearing before him, although he did not know whether the images he saw were real, imagined, or produced by the device.

The images seemed, at first, to make no sense to him. Many were obscene, as many were designed to ridicule his own way of life and that of his people. Others were of beautiful or strange places he had never seen. Others were of his own people, and the city of Lam. Still others were of scenes from Earth, redolent of the culture that EarthGov had adopted and promoted. Then, when the pain started, coinciding with some of the images, he felt he knew what his interrogators were trying to do.

The session lasted a long and painful time, and when it ended he was left, on the table, without clothes, food or drink,



for even longer. Then, the images, the pain, the nausea, began again. No one spoke to him, and this pattern of images, pain, nausea and respite continued for what, to Jorg, seemed an interminable time until he finally succumbed to sleep. But this peaceful rest was short, for as soon as he slept, pain and a brief, very intense, blinding, light, awoke him.

Whether he lay there for hours, or days, he did not know, but by the time the door opened, and he was released from his restraints, Hassan was unable to stand, and even the faint light in the corridor beyond hurt his eyes.

"Here, " a voice beside him said, "please put this on."

A strong hand helped Hassan to stand and place the cloak around his body, and he was led out into the corridor, supported by two people dressed completely in black.

"Are you able to walk?" The voice belonged to a man he recognized.

"Yes, just about, thank you."

"We must go before we are detected." The speaker was the EarthForce Officer who was Captain of the ship Hassan and Jorg had seized, Captain Henry Teal. "We have a vessel waiting which will take you to a rendezvous point where you will be met."

Hassan was led to the small airlock near which Captain Teal took shook his hand. "Please, accept my personal apologies for your treatment. I have a feeling that we might meet again. Take this. It might help your people," and he handed Hassan a small data-crystal.

Was he hallucinating? Was this all a dream? Some kind of ploy? It was a somewhat bewildered Hassan who boarded the unmarked EarthForce stealth Fighter, and an even more bewildered Hassan who sat in a small cargo bay of an old trading freighter after a short but fast journey in the Fighter. The person opposite him - a wiry man in a drably-coloured one-piece outfit whose face was badly scarred from a blast pistol - offered him clothes, food and water, all of which he accepted with silent duas in thanks.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"Seti Prime," the man said. He was the pilot of, and only other person on-board, the trading freighter.

"May I ask why?"

"The Resistance has established a new base there."

"Resistance?"

"To EarthGov."

"Then that EarthForce Officer - "

"Is helping us, yes. There are some, you know, who do not, how shall I say, agree with EarthGov policies. A few, a very few."

Exhausted, Hassan soon fell asleep. It was a refreshing sleep, and he slept all the way to his destination. After the events of the past few days Hassan found the reception that awaited him on Seti Prime quite overwhelming. A crowd, almost a thousand strong, thronged around him, many firing weapons into the air, many cheering, and almost all wanting to shake his hand or embrace him.

"Well," Jorg said when Hassan finally managed to get through the crowd to where he, Deneb, Nils and Yukio waited, "seems you've become something of a hero."

Hassan did not understand why. These were not even his own people, and they most certainly did not share his Way of Life. Besides which, he knew he had not done very much. "I didn't expect this," was all he could say, and he shook hands with Jorg, Nils and Yukio. Deneb stood facing him with her hands on her hips, her head slightly on one side, smiling, and, uncertain what he should do - or what she might do - he was glad when Jorg said, "You know EarthForce has occupied Lam?"

"No. No, I didn't. I must return there."

"That might not be a good idea," Jorg said. "Not at the moment."

"You should rest here, a while," Yukio said to Hassan.

"I don't understand all this," Hassan said, gesturing toward the still lingering crowd.

"Every resistance needs a leader, and heroes, people their enemy love to hate," Yukio said, with a smile, looking first at Jorg and then at Hassan. "With such a leader, such heroes, the resistance can get properly organized."

"You mean, it's not?" Hassan said, surprised.

"No, not yet. There are not many, so far."

"But I take it, then that you are - "

"Involved? Only in a small, a very small way. Now, you should rest."

But Hassan did not feel like resting. He wanted to do something, anything. Something to aid his people, something which would enable him to strike back at EarthForce and EarthGov; and as he looked around at his new warrior friends - Jorg, Deneb, Nils - at the people who still crowded round, at Yukio, and as he remembered the actions of Captain Teal, he began to realize that more, far more, was involved here than just the occupation, by EarthGov, of Lam.

## **Part Four**

### **Return to Lam**

#### **1.**

The Mujahideen had the advantage of surprise. The EarthForce troops had the advantages of superior weapons, numerical superiority and the support of fighter planes. In theory, the EarthForce troops, venturing into the desert with their armoured vehicles, their mobile cannons, their air support, and the advantage of outnumbering the Mujahideen by twenty to one, should have won.

It had all started so well for EarthForce. Lam 3 had been occupied, and secured, with hundreds of the remaining male residents of New Aswan rounded up, and transported to an interrogation centre. A curfew had been imposed, with troops under instruction to shoot on sight anyone breaking the curfew. A Provisional government had been installed, led by those loyal to EarthGov and imported by EarthGov from the Egyptian Protectorate on Earth, with this new Lam government having given many interviews to the few MediaNews representatives that EarthForce had allowed to visit Lam. Several EarthForce Generals had even rashly promised that the campaign would be over within one Earth-week, with Malik Khattab either captured or killed.

That first desert battle, once properly begun, was fierce and, by the standard of the battles of Earth history, not unduly long. EarthForce had sent wave after wave of fighters to bomb what they believed to be rebel positions, high in one of the mountains. The bombardment lasted for nearly a whole Lamian day during which EarthForce troops in their vehicles had moved toward the area. Their first surprise, and lesson, came when they were approaching the mountain proper over the desert sands that lay between it and city of New Aswan. A small group of Mujahideen, no more than thirty in number, ambushed the long EarthForce column, causing initial panic. The leading three EarthForce vehicles were hit, and destroyed, their occupants killed, and it took the EarthForce troops nearly two Lamian hours to assume a defensive position. Thereafter, and given their numerical superiority, and fire-power, they soon had the Mujahideen surrounded, but the Mujahideen fought with a tenacity and ferocity that EarthForce had neither expected nor experienced, inflicting heavy casualties on the invading, occupying, troops.

The Mujahideen continued to fight until every single one of them was killed. Even those who had been wounded had continued fighting, and fearing booby-traps, the EarthForce troops withdrew to a safe distance and called in their air support to drop bomb and missiles on what had been the Mujahideen position.

Even then, the woes of the EarthForce column were not over, and all this even before the main battle had started. For the ambush had so delayed EarthForce they were forced to spend the night camped in the desert. All that night their planes continued to bomb the Mujahideen positions in the mountains that, at Lamian sunset, were now before them and twenty Earth-miles to the East. The sight, and sound, of the heavy bombardment gave the EarthForce troops renewed confidence after the mauling of the ambush: until one, then two, of their parked vehicles exploded, killing nine more troopers. They discovered that two Mujahideen, wired with explosives, had infiltrated their camp under cover of darkness and, sacrificing themselves, had caused the explosions. So it was that the EarthForce troops spent a mainly sleepless night, fearing further incidents. Their mood had also changed, from one of almost arrogant, swaggering optimism, to cautious doubt about the truth of what their senior Officers had said of the campaign being over "within one Earth-week."

The heat of the day was already intense when the EarthForce troops began their assault of the mountain. Again, they met with fierce, determined resistance, and once again, they suffered heavily casualties. But their vast numerical superiority, their superior fire-power, and air support, did enable them, after three Lamian-hours of bloody combat, to advance and overrun the Mujahideen position. They counted only thirty-five enemy dead, and even the rawest of raw EarthForce recruits knew what happened. Those killed - or most of them - had stayed behind, fighting to the death, to enable the main body of fighters to withdraw. Mobile units of EarthForce troops were sent ahead on seek and destroy missions - some dropped from airborne ships - but they all failed to find any trace of Malik Khattab's forces.

Frustrated, the General in charge of the EarthForce assault - General Mason - ordered wave after wave of airborne strikes on the mountains which, as EarthForce scouting parties were later to show, did damage only to the mountains themselves.

None of this prevented General Mason from issuing an optimistic statement about the events of the past two days and he even - after consultation with the President of EarthGov - was interviewed by PlanetEarth News standing in front of the Founders Monument in New Aswan with Musa Raja beside him, surrounded by smiling EarthForce troopers.

Breaking News! Interviewed this morning in New Aswan on Lam, the General commanding the EarthForce troops there - General Mason - announced that Operation Eagle had been an astounding success.

"Yesterday, elite units from EarthForce engaged the enemy at several places in the mountains to the east of the city. Large quantities of weapons were seized and destroyed, and over fifty terrorists were killed. Our own casualties amounted to nine wounded, and three fatalities. Our heartfelt sympathies go out to the families and relatives of those EarthForce troopers killed. They died fighting to ensure that we and our allies can live in peace and freedom."

In a new development, the President of EarthGov has announced a generous package of aid to help the residents of New Aswan. He also announced that the first of what is expected to many transports of new settlers, all from the Egyptian Protectorate, had left Earth, bound for Lam.

High on one of the mountains of Lam, many Earth-miles from the city of New Aswan, the ancient call to prayer could be heard, and Malik Khattab joined the other Mujahideen as they, following the tradition of their Way of Life, faced the direction of the Land of the Two Holy Places on far distant Earth.

## 2.

Hassan insisted he should go alone. Deneb insisted she should go with him. Jorg and Nils were both keeping out of the argument as they all sat in the corner of one of the recreation areas on Seti Prime that had become their unofficial headquarters. Since they knew that EarthForce had now blockaded Lam, the option of going there directly by ship had been rejected, and it was Yukio who had suggested that Hassan - suitably disguised - secretly join one of the many passenger ships that had begun to ferry the new settlers from Earth to Lam. And it was Yukio who was the first to mention the loss of Hassan's beard, saying in his diplomatic way that it was in some ways fortunate since few if any of the new male settlers to Lam had them.

"Look!" Deneb was almost shouting at Hassan. "For the last time, you stubborn man, it would look far less suspicious if I went with you."

"If I may say so," Yukio said, "she is correct."

Hassan sighed. "I suppose so." He turned toward Deneb. "You do understand, don't you, that we might be stuck there a while."

"Of course I do!"

"And that you'd have to dress a little differently."

"Of course! And don't you worry: I shall behave myself," she said with a sly grin that made Hassan turn away in embarrassment.

It was all arranged by the following day, courtesy of Yukio's resistance connections, and Jorg and Nils had to greatly restrain themselves to contain their amazement as Deneb, escorted by Yukio's daughter and two other settler women, entered the recreation area. She was dressed in the traditional black costume that the women inhabitants of Lam wore when outdoors, although Deneb herself had made a few almost unnoticeable alterations. The addition of a thin veil left only her eyes visible.

"You look - different," was all Hassan could say.

"Great for hiding weapons," Deneb said, and produced her sword, a knife, two blast pistols and several stun grenades.

"Time to go," Yukio said.

The journey was long, tedious, quite boring and took three days, and they spent some of the time learning their new identities, with the rest given over to Hassan's attempts to teach Deneb at least some of the language of his own ancestors. The first two legs of the journey were in secret compartments in slow freighters; the third in a liberated EarthForce scout vessel and the fourth, and final, leg in an unmarked, unnamed but fast trading vessel of a type Hassan associated with the Space Pirates. They disembarked at the busy ferry terminals on Proxima, and found it quite easy to mingle with the dozens of new settlers bound for Lam. The fact that EarthGov had given generous financial inducements to the people of the Egyptian Protectorate made the scenes around the boarding gates quite chaotic. This

worked to their advantage and, with their datacrystal identity documents checked and arousing no suspicion, they were soon on board one of the passenger ships that EarthGov had chartered.

They arrived on Lam, as the Lamian sun was setting, at the new Spaceport that EarthForce was in the process of constructing, a few miles out into the desert from the city of New Aswan, and both Hassan and Deneb were dismayed to see that each new arrival, and what little luggage they had been allowed to bring, were being searched by EarthForce troopers.

"Any ideas?" Deneb asked, already holding, under her garment, a blast pistol in one hand and a stun grenade in the other.

The Spaceport was a simple affair of three landing pads, one small, squat, control complex and two other small one storey buildings, the whole surrounded by high fences. Groups of armed EarthForce troopers hung around these perimeter fences, obviously bored, some standing, others sitting or squatting on the desert sand. One group sat listening to loud, new Earth-style music and drinking an intoxicating liquor from their EarthForce issue mugs. Another group was playing some sort of game with a ball, with many of this group gesturing and shouting wildly.

The new arrivals were being ushered into a queue which had formed behind the perimeter gates where seven troopers screened them. One of the troopers checked their datacrystal identities on the console in his hand before waving them on to two troopers who checked them with hand-held detectors. Anything suspicious, and the new settlers and their luggage were physically searched. Open-topped hover passenger vehicles waited beyond the gates to take them to a transit camp near New Aswan.

"Could you drive one of those," Hassan asked Deneb, inclining his head in the direction of the vehicles.

"We'll soon find out!"

They were at the front of the queue when Deneb - making use of her subtle alterations to her garment - produced her blast pistol and shot four of the guards in rapid succession. Hassan dispatched the rest, and as they ran through the gates Deneb threw the first of her stun grenades.

"My apologies," Deneb said to the male driver of the nearest passenger hover before throwing him from his seat onto the sand. The EarthForce troopers had only just reacted by the time Hassan joined her, gesturing with his stun pistol for the six occupants of the transport to leave. They did, as the EarthForce troopers began firing, and Deneb lurched the vehicle away into the desert amid a hail of blast rifle fire.

Once in the desert, with the darkness of the Lamian night having quickly descended, Hassan was undecided as to which direction to go. Despite his attempts during the past three days, he had been unable to establish any communication link with the Mujahideen on Lam, a failure he assumed was due to their using, for reasons of security, new frequencies and codes. Behind him, he could see the bright lights of New Aswan and the two new military bases EarthForce had established outside the city, and he felt sure that, sooner rather than later, EarthForce ground attack ships would be launched in an attempt to find them. Ahead, all was darkness.

After a brief discussion with Deneb, Hassan decided they should head East toward the nearest mountain where he knew some fighting had taken place, and they had been travelling in the hijacked hover transport for only a short while when two EarthForce ships attacked. The ponderous, slow, transport was no match for them and Deneb landed as the canons of the EarthForce ships strafed them. Setting the transport on cruise-control, they watched it rise a few feet above the sand and slowly move away toward the mountain. It did not get far before a missile from one of the EarthForce ships destroyed it.

Then, they were alone in the desert, with no sounds, and nothing to see, and they cautiously set off Eastwards. Dawn, with its fiery heat, found them near the foot of the mountain escarpment, and they settled down behind a shielding, jagged outcrop of rock to wait the long hours until darkness. Despite his best intentions, Hassan fell asleep, to be awakened several Lamian-hours later by the sound of someone moving among the rock rubble above them.

He gestured to Deneb that he would circle round, and she nodded her head in silent agreement, but he had gone only a few yards before they were both surrounded.

"Alhamdulillah! Assalamu Alaikum!" he called out.

One of the Mujahideen came toward him, smiling. "Wa alaikum as-salaam."

"I am -" Hassan began to say.

"We know who you are, and have been expecting you. We saw what happened, last night."

It was a long, difficult and arduous walk up the escarpment toward the the almost flat plateau that marked the summit of the mountain, and even when they reached its jagged, rubble strewn top, they did not stop. Instead, they descended down one side to a small ridge and along a narrow gully carved out millennia ago by the water that had once cascaded down during one of the rain-storms that had then been a feature of the planet's climate. Many miles, and wearying walking later, they arrived at some caves.

They were given some food, and water, and goatskin rugs to sit upon, and spent nearly a whole Lamian-hour sitting on the floor of the cave, having eaten and drunk as much as they could. Outside, several Mujahideen sat or stood wherever there was shade, watching the desert sands below, and it was late afternoon when Deneb and Hassan were guided to another cave.

Inside, in a subdued artificial light, several Mujahideen leaders, including Malik Khattab, sat on goatskin rugs.

"Assalamu Alaikum," Malik said in greeting, "come, sit here," indicating a space.

Hassan sat on one of the rugs, and Deneb - her face veiled - on the other. Several of the Mujahideen watched her, suspiciously.

"Alhamdulillah, you are safe." Malik said. "There is much to discuss."

"Yes, " Hassan said. "This is Deneb, who has fought bravely at my side."

Only Malik smiled at her. "How did you escape?" Malik asked him.

"An EarthForce Officer helped me." His words had the surprise effect he expected.

"EarthForce?" one of the Mujahideen leaders said in disbelief.

"Yes," Hassan continued. "There is a resistance organization opposed to EarthGov. They've been helping us, me. I've come here to propose an alliance."

"With this resistance group?" Malik asked.

"Yes," Hassan replied.

"We do not need their help," one of the Mujahideen said. "We do not need alliances, and especially not with those who do not share our Way of Life."

"But," Hassan continued, "was it not Ibn Qadmah who said that, according to Ahmad, it is permissible for us to ask help from those who do not follow our Way of Life; and was it not Ahmad's opinion that these helpers can have a share in whatever booty is obtained? And was it not Ar Ramli who said that the leader or second in command may ask help from those who do not follow our Way of Life provided they have a good opinion of us and we need their help because we are few?"

"It is so written," Malik said.

"They are good people. They helped me get here. And, it is my opinion that more is at stake here than the occupation of Lam."

"What do you mean? " another of the Mujahideen said.

"Earth is expanding; it is creating an Empire. When InshaAllah the war here on Lam is won and we have expelled the invaders, EarthGov and EarthForce will still exist. We need military alliances on other worlds; will need to fight those who oppose us. We are few; Earth and its colonies are many. We should look into the future, of forming some kind of alliance which can oppose Earth and its Empire."

"I myself know this," Malik said.

A hitherto silent, elderly Mujahideen spoke. "What Hassan Zahr says is truth."

"Then, if we agree," Malik said to Hassan, "you would be our liaison with this resistance?"

"Yes."

"And what form would this alliance take?" Malik asked.

"Well, at the moment they can assist us with weapons, and information. Here's a start," and he handed Malik the datacrystal that Captain Teal had given him. "I've scanned it. It contains details of EarthForce deployments in the sector round Lam; their secure communication frequencies, and codes."

"And in return?" Malik asked.

"Nothing's settled yet. We've only just started. But what I would suggest to begin with is that a few of our people - scientists - help develop effective weapons and other such things."

"Including the synchrodrive?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"They're trying to establish a base on Seti Prime. And if that falls, then further out."

"Interesting," Malik said. "We shall have to discuss the matter."

"Of course."

Hassan and Deneb were led back to their cave, but it was not long before Malik joined them. "It is decided. We agree to this alliance, providing it is you who is our representative."

"Alhamdulillah!"

"Now, there remains, InshaAllah, the small matter of getting you both safely off Lam."

### 3.

The arrangements took longer than expected - five days, in fact - during which Hassan had been politely advised to persuade Deneb to stay with the few women who had accompanied their husbands and who lived at that time in one of the larger mountain caves. Twice during these days of waiting everyone moved to a new location; twice Hassan was able to walk beside, and talk to, Deneb; twice he was surprised at how pleased he was to see her, and twice she surprised him. She surprised him by asking questions about his Way of Life; she surprised him by speaking the language of his ancestors; but most of all she surprised him by knowing about his own past and that of his people.

His days were filled with discussions, with working out procedures for contacts, messages, attacks and meetings, but he was glad when the day of departure arrived, desiring as he did to be once again in Space, once again doing something practical against EarthForce.

The synchrondrive ship that would take them was one of only two left on Lam, camouflaged and hidden in a dry river bed, between two steep escarpments, similar to those sometimes found in Earth's deserts, with the difference that no surface water of any kind had flowed on Lam for millennia, excepting for the irrigation channels, recently dug and filled from underground sources, which lay to the West, South and North of New Aswan, extending for miles, and which brought the lush green of cultivation to those parts of the sterile if beautiful desert.

Malik had arranged a diversion to give the ship the best chance of leaving undetected, at least until it reached orbit. Travelling by night, two small groups of Mujahideen had infiltrated near one of the EarthForce camps and, at the pre-arranged time, began a bombardment before launching their attack. The ship, piloted by Hassan, carried, beside Deneb, three passengers, all scientists, and it was a happy Hassan who, with Deneb seated beside him, and following Jorg's example of what seemed a long time ago on Earth, engaged synchrondrive at blast off.

The tactic worked, for although it caused devastation in and around the now empty river bed, it did enable him to reach orbit before the EarthForce fighters and interceptors could react. Several EarthForce vessels followed, but they were unable to match the velocity of the synchron-drive ship and soon gave up their pursuit.

"It will be good to see the others, again. A new beginning, " Deneb said, and threw off the black garment she had been wearing since their departure from Seti Prime to reveal her usual military style clothing.

"Yes; this will be a new beginning, for all of us, especially now this alliance is agreed. We can begin to hit back at EarthGov," Hassan said.

"You and I, we make a good team. I knew we would."

"Yes, we all seem to work together well. You, me, Jorg, Nils, Yukio."

Deneb smiled. He was not going to escape that easily.

---

## Glossary

Synchron-drive:

A new type of starship technology, developed on Lam 3 over a period of many decades, which would revolutionize Space travel and is far superior to the common StarDrive. Synchron is short for synchronous and refers to the synchronicity concept: a manifestation in causal Space-Time of synchronous energies which energies cannot be described by concepts of causal Time and causal, three-dimensional, Space.

EarthForce:

Initially, EarthForce was an elite squadron set up by the President of the Earth Government and under his direct command. However, as the Imperial ambitions of Earth Government grew, it was significantly expanded while still retaining its elite status. One of its principal aims is to plan and execute an invasion of Lam 3 and so destroy what the Earth Government and its military regard as the threat from Lam.

Eridani:

Star system containing the planet which serves as the base for the Space Pirates: rogue traders who ply the stellar trading routes between Earth and the new star colonies, although some of the traders have taken to supplementing their income by hijacking ships and cargo vessels. Many of these traders are former convicts or political prisoners from Earth or the Mars colony who have escaped or served their sentences, while others are adventurers.

Kursums:

A rare mineral found deep underground on a planet in a star-system near Eridani. Used as currency by stellar traders.

New Aswan:

The city on the rather desolate planet of Lam 3 occupied by the migrants from Earth who took with them their way of life and their ancient desert culture. It is the only inhabited part of the planet, although the surrounding area has been irrigated and brought under cultivation. The whole terrain of Lam 3 is desert-like, and not unlike the Nubian Desert on planet Earth, although the star around which Lam 3 orbits is brighter and hotter than Earth's star, the Sun. This makes the terrain desolate and inhospitable, and there is no surface water, although there is underground water in a few places. The new city was established near one such place.

The Earth city of Aswan was originally a small community by the river Nile.

Recently, a new government was established on Lam, one of whose declared aims is to liberate the territories around Aswan (Earth) which are under Martial Law, declared by the Earth Government.

InshaAllah:

"If Allah wills it". Used by the residents of Lam, and those who follow their Way of Life and culture, who believe that it is Allah and Allah alone Who controls the fate of human beings and all living things. Allah is regarded as the Supreme Being, the Creator of the Cosmos.

Assalamu Alaikum:

"May peace be with you." Traditional greeting used by the residents of Lam and those who follow their Way of Life and culture. The response is: "Wa alaikum as-salaam" which means "And may Peace be with you as well."

Alhamdulillah:

"All Praise be to Allah." Said by the residents of Lam, and those who follow their Way of Life and culture.